

EXHIBIT 4

THE LOOMING TOWER

*Al-Qaeda and the
Road to 9/11*

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For the young, the future in this already joyless environment promised even less than the present. Only a few years earlier, Saudi Arabia had been on its way to becoming the wealthiest country, per capita, in the world, thanks to the bounty of its oil wealth. Now the declining price of oil crushed such expectations. The government, which had promised jobs to university graduates, withdrew its guarantees, creating the previously unknown phenomenon of unemployment. Despair and idleness are dangerous companions in any culture, and it was inevitable that the young would search for a hero who could voice their longing for change and provide a focus for their rage.

Neither a cleric nor a prince, Osama bin Laden assumed this new role, even though there was no precedent for such an independent agent in the Kingdom. He offered a conventional, Muslim Brothers critique of the plight of the Arab world: The West, particularly the United States, was responsible for the humiliating failure of the Arabs to succeed. "They have attacked our brothers in Palestine as they have attacked Muslims and Arabs elsewhere," he said one spring night in the bin Laden family mosque in Jeddah, just after evening prayers. "The blood of Muslims is shed. It has become too much. . . . We are only looked upon as sheep, and we are very humiliated."

Bin Laden wore a white robe with a gauzy camel-colored cloak draped over his shoulders. He spoke in a sleepy monotone, sometimes wagging his long, bony index finger to make a point, but his manner was relaxed and his gestures were limp and wan. Already, the messianic stare into the middle distance that would characterize his later pronouncements was on display. Before him hundreds of men sat cross-legged on the carpet. Many of them had fought with him in Afghanistan, and they sought a new direction in their lives. Their old enemy, the Soviet Union, was falling to pieces, but America did not seem to offer such an obvious substitute.

At first, it was difficult to grasp the basis of bin Laden's complaint. The United States had never been a colonial power, nor for that matter had Saudi Arabia ever been colonized. Of course, he was speaking for Muslims in general, for whom American support of Israel was a cause of anguish, but the United States had been a decisive ally in the Afghan jihad. The sense of humiliation he expressed had more to do with the stance of Muslims in the modern world. Their lives were sold at a discount, bin Laden was telling his hometown audience, which con-

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firmed their sense that other lives—Western, American lives—were fuller and more worthwhile.

Bin Laden gave them a history lesson. “America went to Vietnam, thousands of miles away, and began bombing them in planes. The Americans did not get out of Vietnam until after they suffered great losses. Over sixty thousand American soldiers were killed until there were demonstrations by the American people. The Americans won’t stop their support of Jews in Palestine until we give them a lot of blows. They won’t stop until we do jihad against them.”

There he stood, on the threshold of advocating violence against the United States, but he suddenly stopped himself. “What is required is to wage an economic war against America,” he continued. “We have to boycott all American products. . . . They’re taking the money we pay them for their products and giving it to the Jews to kill our brothers.” The man who had made his name in combat against the Soviets now invoked Mahatma Gandhi, who brought down the British Empire “by boycotting its products and wearing non-Western clothes.” He urged a public-relations campaign. “Any American we see, we should notify of our complaints,” bin Laden meekly concluded. “We should write to American embassies.”

BIN LADEN WOULD LATER SAY that the United States had always been his enemy. He dated his hatred for America to 1982, “when America permitted the Israelis to invade Lebanon and the American Sixth Fleet helped them.” He recalled the carnage: “blood and severed limbs, women and children sprawled everywhere. Houses destroyed along with their occupants and high rises demolished over their residents. . . . The situation was like a crocodile meeting a helpless child, powerless except for his screams.” This scene provoked an intense desire to fight tyranny, he said, and a longing for revenge. “As I looked at those demolished towers in Lebanon, it entered my mind that we should punish the oppressor in kind and that we should destroy towers in America in order that they taste some of what we tasted.”

His actions at the time belied this public stance. Privately, bin Laden approached members of the royal family during the Afghan jihad to express his gratitude for American participation in that war. Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi ambassador to the United States, remembered bin Laden coming to him and saying, “Thank you. Thank

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you for bringing the Americans to help us get rid of the secularist, atheist Soviets.”

Bin Laden had never shown himself to be an interesting or original political thinker—his analysis, until then, was standard Islamist boilerplate, uninformed by any deep experiences in the West. And yet, wrapped in the mystique that had been spun around him, bin Laden held a position in Saudi society that gave weight to his pronouncements. The very fact that his American critique was being uttered at all—in a country where speech was so curtailed—suggested to other Saudis that there must be royal consent behind the anti-American campaign that bin Laden had launched.

Few countries in the world were so different from each other, and yet so dependent on one another, as America and Saudi Arabia. Americans built the Saudi petroleum industry; American construction companies, such as Bechtel, built much of the country’s infrastructure; Howard Hughes’s company, Trans World Airlines, built the Saudi passenger air service; the Ford Foundation modernized Saudi government; the U.S. Corps of Engineers built the country’s television and broadcast facilities and oversaw the development of its defense industry. Meantime, Saudi Arabia sent its top students to American universities—more than thirty thousand per year during the 1970s and 1980s. In return, more than 200,000 Americans have lived and worked in the Kingdom since the discovery of oil. Saudi Arabia needed American investment, management, technology, and education to guide it into the modern world. America, for its part, became increasingly reliant on Saudi oil to sustain its economic and military supremacy. In 1970 the United States was the tenth greatest importer of Saudi oil; a decade later, it was number one.

By that time, Saudi Arabia had replaced Iran as America’s main ally in the Persian Gulf. The Kingdom depended on U.S. arms and defense agreements for its protection. Thus the apparent complicity on the part of the royal family in bin Laden’s escalating verbal attack on America seemed a suicidal paradox. But so long as bin Laden remained focused on an external enemy, he diverted popular attention from the princely looting of the oil wealth and the spiral of religious fanaticism. Events would soon give bin Laden the excuse he sought to make America into the enemy he needed.